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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0416  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0354  
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON PRIORITY 0343  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0200  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0214  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 0285  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 DILI 000192

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DEPT FOR EAP/MTS  
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SUBJECT: MORE VIOLENCE IN DILI AREA LAST NIGHT, BUT CALM TODAY

REF: A) DILI 189 B) DILI 184; C) DILI 181; D) DILI 178; E) DILI 169; F) DILI 152; G) DILI 147; H) DILI 144

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1. (U) Summary: There was more rioting yesterday evening in the village of Tasitolu, just west of Dili, and at least three more people died, apparently shot by members of the armed forces (FDTL) who had responded to the Tasitolu riot, in addition to the two who had died earlier in Dili. Although senior Government of East Timor (GOET) leaders and others attribute the rioting to members of a radical group that had infiltrated a peaceful demonstration by 595 ex-soldiers, there are credible reports that at least a few of the ex-soldiers participated in the subsequent rioting. FDTL patrolled Tasitolu and parts of Dili last night and today, and their vigorous attempts to seek out and arrest their ex-colleagues contributed to a climate of fear and tension in Dili. Dili was, however, calm by the end of today. Thousands of people fled the city and thousands of other sought refuge in churches, police stations, military headquarters, the UN compound, and Embassies including the U.S. Embassy. The Embassy is secure notwithstanding the continued presence on the compound of some FSN employees and their families who are expected to depart early tomorrow. Embassy is in touch with U.S. citizen employees and other U.S. citizen residents of East Timor and has received no reports of harm or serious danger to U.S. citizens. End summary.

More on Dili riot yesterday  
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2. (U) The Embassy has received more details from eyewitnesses as well as official reports regarding the demonstration and subsequent riot that took place in Dili yesterday afternoon, with riot activity continuing into the evening. The following is what we now understand regarding these events:

-- Around mid-day at least three groups of demonstrators convened near the Government compound. The first two groups comprised primarily young men who did not appear to be connected to the 595 ex-soldiers who had initiated the demonstration. (Note: the 595 ex-soldiers are now generally referred to by all sides as "the petitioners"). One of these groups of young men in particular was agitating for conflict from the beginning, and is believed by Government sources to consist of members of the radical anti-government group Colimau 2000 (see Reftel). The third group to arrive was made of a number of the petitioners. The non-petitioner groups were heard to be shouting that they had lost patience, that they wanted to remove the Prime Minister, and that they were ready to die for their cause. A number of the petitioners attempted to hold the crowd back (as described in Reftel A); however, there are reliable reports that a few petitioners were encouraging the would-be rioters.

-- When the group broke through and started moving into the Government compound, a few of the petitioners joined with them and participated in the violent destruction of property, including burning at least two cars and breaking car and building windows. One policeman was injured by a machete during this initial melee.

-- The group effectively split into two as things proceeded. The first was a group of approximately 200-300 rioters, mostly young civilians but including at least a few petitioners, who smashed cars and other property as they proceeded. The second group apparently consisted of most of the petitioners who had been at the demonstration, although eyewitness accounts vary. This group was some distance behind the first group, marching in an orderly and peaceful manner with a police escort. Both groups proceeded west through the Comoro neighborhood on the road that leads to the village of Tasitolu, which had been the staging ground for the demonstration.

-- When the first group --- that is, the rioters --- reached Comoro Market, they turned their attention to attacking the market, perhaps because some vendors in the market are "Lorosa'e" people from the eastern districts of East Timor. The market vendors came out to fight the crowd, and police also intervened with tear gas. A journalist covering the developments said he saw an ambulance taking 22 injured people and one dead person from the scene.

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-- Further along their path, the rioters burned a house and destroyed a number of roadside kiosks.

-- When the rioters reached Tasitolu, they dispersed into at least two groups, heading into neighborhoods on either side of the main road and continuing their rampage. At this point the police, including riot police, were on hand and attempting to detain the rioters.

-- As in Dili, eyewitnesses to the rioting in Tasitolu reported seeing at least a few petitioners participating in the destruction along with a larger group of civilians.

FDTL join in security operations, kill 3 alleged rioters, target ex-FDTL petitioners

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13. (U) Up until late afternoon yesterday (April 28), all operations against the rioting were carried out by the police (PNTL). However, at about 5:00 p.m. yesterday, active duty members of the armed forces (FDTL) became directly involved in the operations. According to an official briefing, the FDTL was given responsibility for the Tasitolu area and the adjacent areas of the Comoro neighborhood. The PNTL were to continue to patrol in the rest of the city. However, some FDTL were seen during last night and today patrolling in other areas of Dili. Also, Embassy staff saw joint PNTL-FDTL operations being carried out in town on the road leading toward Tasitolu. Up until now, while it appears that the FDTL is primarily responsible for Tasitolu, the exact division of responsibilities remains murky.

14. (U) Shortly after 5 p.m. yesterday, FDTL members arrived in Tasitolu to assist the police in ending the riot and/or arresting the rioters. According to Colonel Lere, a firefight ensued in which the rioters threw two grenades, slightly injuring one FDTL member, and the FDTL responded with gunfire, killing three rioters.

15. (U) Gunfire was heard throughout the night and into the morning not only in Tasitolu but also in Comoro and in the area of the U.S. Embassy, which is near Comoro. Embassies heard some of this gunfire, as did numerous other credible sources. In addition, we received reports of disturbances in the Becora area of Dili, which is on the eastern side of town, including 5-10 shots fired in the early morning. Finally, several Embassy personnel saw a large blaze at Taibesi Market, which has been the site of repeated disturbances in recent weeks (see Reftel B and refs therein) in the early evening. An Embassy source later confirmed that several houses in the market area had been burned.

16. (U) The areas in which gunfire was heard corresponded roughly to the areas in which FDTL members were patrolling, although some eyewitnesses to the Dili rioting early yesterday afternoon also saw PNTL officers firing their guns in the air.

17. (U) Embassy has heard multiple reports of FDTL soldiers going to the homes of petitioners' families and demanding, in some cases at gunpoint, that they reveal the petitioner's whereabouts. One of these reports was an eyewitness account from a reliable Embassy employee whose brother is one of the petitioners. Many Dili residents believe that the FDTL who are conducting these raids may be more interested in exacting revenge against their former colleagues than in investigating particular crimes. According to FDTL Colonel Lere (the acting commander of FDTL) and PNTL Commissioner Paulo Martins, petitioners who are arrested by FDTL are promptly turned over to the police, who will hold them for investigation and questioning

and release those who do not appear to have committed crimes. However, several police officers have expressed concern to Emboffs that petitioners should turn themselves in to the police, rather than risk capture by FDTL. These police officers share the general view that some FDTL members may be planning retribution rather than simple detention.

18. (U) At approximately 10:45am today, Commissioner Martins and Colonel Lere made a joint announcement via radio. They stated that the PNTL and FDTL are working jointly to maintain security

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in Dili, that the situation was mostly calm, and urged the population to remain calm. However, in addition, they announced that they are currently attempting to detain all the petitioners who were involved in yesterday's demonstrations.

19. (U) In a briefing to the heads of diplomatic missions today, Foreign Minister Jose Ramos-Horta continued to emphasize that petitioners were not to blame for the violence, which he said had been perpetrated by members of Colimau 2000 who had "seized control" of the demonstration. However, in the same briefing Colonel Lere reiterated that FDTL was attempting to arrest and detain all of the petitioners. When asked why the petitioners were being targeted for arrest if they were not involved in criminal activity, Lere stated that at least one petitioner had been observed participating in the Tasitolu firefight, and that it was hard to know who had committed crimes and who had not until the crimes had been thoroughly investigated.

110. (SBU) Both Foreign Minister Ramos Horta and President Xanana Gusmao told Ambassador Rees that they would discuss this aspect of the matter with Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri the need to get FDTL out of the law-enforcement business as soon as possible, and particularly the possibility that house-to-house searches by FDTL members seeking to arrest their ex-colleagues could exacerbate the climate of fear and distrust among the general population of Dili. President Gusmao was later overheard telling someone on the telephone to "tell the Prime Minister the armed forces must be removed today." At the end of the day the Government issued a press release announcing that FDTL would be withdrawn from law enforcement activities in Dili and surrounding areas (presumably including Tasitolu) by tomorrow, April 30. However, GOET sources report that FDTL will continue to patrol Tasitolu and parts of Comoro at least until tomorrow morning.

Current situation: calm but tense

111. (U) Most of Dili is currently calm and has been all day. Communications within Dili have been difficult since yesterday afternoon as the cell phone system is overloaded. Calls frequently take numerous tries to get through, and text messages are only marginally more reliable. This has added a further challenge to obtaining updated information from Embassy contacts. Flights in and out of the airport have continued as usual and Mission personnel and others reported normal conditions on the road to the airport. Many shops and gas stations are closed, but a few remain open. However, almost all the market stalls remain empty.

112. (U) At some time during the night or early morning, the road to Tasitolu was completely blocked off by the FDTL. No one has been allowed through and the area is reportedly completely under FDTL control. We have been unable to obtain any reliable information regarding developments there. However, one PNTL source in Tasitolu reported this afternoon that the situation was calm and under control.

113. (U) The most recent information available from the UN and other diplomatic missions is that they have taken a similar stance as the US Embassy regarding their staff and citizens. A UN security advisory issued this morning stated that the situation in Dili is calm but tense, and advised all staff to stay in place if safe where they are. UN staff report no further update in their security stance since then.

Thousands seek refuge

114. (U) With access to accurate and up to date news already limited in Dili, and with that situation compounded by an overloaded cell phone system, the vast majority of the population does not have access to good information on developments. As a result, the current situation, while serious, has been further blown out of proportion by the Dili rumor mill. Thousands of Dili residents have reportedly left their homes to seek refuge elsewhere. Embassy staff and others have seen throughout last night and today people with their

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belongings leaving their neighborhoods, including many truckloads of people leaving Dili on roads that lead to other parts of the country. The Don Bosco church compound, in the Comoro neighborhood, reportedly has taken in at least 2000 displaced persons. Other churches around Dili have accepted perhaps another 2000, and several thousand more (presumably relatives of police officers and active duty FDTL members respectively) are camping out in police stations, the police academy compound, and the FDTL headquarters. Others gathered at the United Nations compound and at several Embassies, including those of the United States, Indonesia, and New Zealand. These consisted primarily of employees of the UN and of the respective Embassies, together with their families.

15. (U) Yesterday afternoon and last night a number of U.S. Embassy FSN employees and members of their immediate families were admitted to the Embassy compound. As of late last night the total number of persons on the Embassy grounds was estimated at no more than 100. Almost all of these were family members of FSN guards who had expressed a fear of coming to work and leaving their families unprotected. See EAC cable sent concurrently. In addition, a crowd ranging from a few dozen to several hundred has gathered outside the Embassy at various times during the last 24 hours. Some members of the crowd have unsuccessfully requested refuge in the Embassy, while others apparently believing that it is safer to be in the vicinity of the Embassy than in their neighborhoods. Early this morning some Embassy guards inadvertently admitted to the Embassy grounds a large number of people who were not Embassy employees or immediate family members. At one point the number of people inside the compound may have been 500 or higher. However, Embassy personnel immediately began working to persuade people to seek refuge elsewhere, and by day's end the situation both inside and outside the Embassy has been substantially resolved. At about President Gusmao came to the Embassy at around 2:00 pm today and advised the people in front that the situation was safe and that they should depart. Ambassador Rees gave several similar speeches to those inside the compound during the course of the afternoon. The President then went to the Catholic Church in Motael (about a kilometer away from the Embassy) and was able to convince the Church to take in everyone outside of the Embassy as well as everyone who had taken refuge in the compound. Embassy and USAID personnel worked with GOET officials to ensure that food, water, sanitary facilities, and rudimentary sleeping accommodations were brought to Motael. As of late afternoon, most of the people who had been in the compound had departed for Motael or for their homes. Approximately 200 remain, almost all of them Embassy employees or immediate family members. Embosffs have made clear to these people that they will be expected to depart the Embassy compound by tomorrow morning, and they appear to have accepted this decision.

16. (U) Meanwhile, a handful of American citizens residing in the affected neighborhoods have been in contact with Conoff. In one circumstance, Conoff last night arranged to evacuate a family that was residing in the Tasitolu area that is currently cut off from the rest of Dili by FDTL blockade. Other Amcits have expressed concern, but relayed that for now they plan to remain in situ as they have not been directly threatened or targeted and, in consult with Conoff, have assessed that it is most likely safer to remain in a secure building than to attempt to depart via roads where unrest may be continuing. Most Amcits in Dili, however, are residing in neighborhoods that have not been directly affected. All U.S. citizen employees of the Embassy and other USG agencies in Timor are in frequent contact with the Embassy and consider themselves to be safe in their homes.

REES